

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY

Interview with Robert "Bob" Queen -- December 28, 1995

Q: This is an interview of Mr. Robert Queen at his residence of 276 Ninth Street in Darby, Pennsylvania. This interview is for the Krueger-Scott Mansion Cultural Center Oral History Project. Today's date is December the twenty-eighth, 1995. The name of the interviewer is Giles R. Wright. Okay. Might as well get started. As we both know, in 1990, I interviewed you and basically got your life history. What I'm going to do with that interview, is I'm going to share that interview and the tape, which is a transcription of that interview, with the Krueger-Scott Mansion Project, Oral History Project. So this interview that we're doing today will be sort of a companion to that interview. And basically what we will do today is really sort of hone in on your experiences and your recollections, your experiences in Newark, your recollections of your experiences of your life. For the record, give me your complete name again.

Queen: Robert Calvin Queen.

Q: All right. Your place of birth.

Queen: Newark, New Jersey.

Q: Your date of birth.

Queen: June 10, 1912.

Q: So you were actually born in Newark.

Queen: Right.

Q: Just very sort of briefly, let's, you're born in Newark, but I don't think you stayed there that

long, is that?

Queen: No. Cause my father went to Washington.

Q: Okay.

Queen: I was born on the corner of West Kinney and Livingston Streets, and my daughter, Roberta, has done quite a dossier on the Queen-Stanfield family, and she found out the address where I was born, got my birth certificate and everything. And so it was right on the corner there. I think it still's there. I understand that there's a junior high school there now on one corner. Of course, the other corner's where I was born.

Q: And you didn't stay there that long?

Queen: No.

Q: Where did you, where did the family move next?

Queen: Well, from Newark we went to. I tell you I made a couple of little moves. One of them was to Trenton. But we didn't stay long, because my father became clerk of the New Jersey Commission on.

Q: That's okay. We can come back to that. But that necessitated the moving of the family to Trenton.

Queen: Yeah. We were in Trenton twice.

Q: What was the occupation of your father?

Queen: At that time?

Q: Yes.

Queen: I know he was still, he had a job with the state, the state commission on emancipation proclamation commission. Yes.

Q: That's interesting.

Queen: Yes. But he didn't stay there too long either cause he went on from there to Washington, D.C.

Q: Is that when he went to law school?

Queen: Yes.

Q: Okay. So your father goes to law school after you're born.

Queen: Oh yes.

Q: Okay. So from Newark you moved to Trenton.

Queen: Yeah. For a brief period. And, of course, I don't know nothing about it. And then we went on to Washington, D.C.

Q: How long did you stay there?

Queen: Stayed in Washington, D.C. until nineteen twenty, well after World War I was over. My sister was born in 1918 in Washington. And she was about, 1922 that we left Washington,

somewhere in there. I wouldn't know, because let's see that was 1922 when we wound up in Trenton.

Q: But this is the during the period that your father went to law school.

Queen: Howard University, yeah.

Q: Okay. He's going through Howard University's Law School.

Queen: Yeah. In Washington.

Q: In Washington. He finishes law school, and then is that when you leave Washington, D.C. after he's finished law school?

Queen: Yeah, after he finished law school.

Q: And where did you go then?

Queen: Went to Atlantic City.

Q: Atlantic City. Okay. How long you were in Atlantic City?

Queen: In Atlantic City from 1922 until about 1925 or 26 or something like that.

Q: All right. Atlantic City to where?

Queen: Trenton.

Q: Trenton. I think I recall your going through elementary school, junior high school.

Queen: I went to elementary school in Atlantic City, [?] Avenue School, and then when we got to Trenton, I went to Lincoln School.

Q: All right. You went to Trenton High School as I recall?

Queen: Right.

Q: After finishing high school, tell us about it.

Queen: Well, after finishing high school, I got married.

Q: Got married?

Queen: Yeah. And that about closed the books on a lot of things academically. And we had one child.

Q: This is in Trenton?

Queen: Yes. And my oldest daughter was born in Trenton around 1930, 33 she was born. And last week, the 21st of December, we marked the 63rd anniversary of my mother passing. She died in Trenton.

Q: Okay. You're in Trenton. And is it from Trenton that you go to Newark?

Queen: Yes.

Q: What's the time span there?

Queen: Well, the time span, the time span run about 1937.

Q: So that's when you come back to Newark, 1937?

Queen: Yeah. Actually it was coming to Newark, because I didn't know nothing about it.

Q: Okay. But you mean you're returning but you didn't recall too much because you were just simply born there and moved shortly thereafter.

Queen: The only times that we had in Newark was when we went to Montclair and my mother's family and we'd drive through it.

Q: Okay. All right. So around 1937 is when you're going to. What prompts your going to Newark?

Queen: Well, I tell you the truth I had gotten this desire to, my father wanted me to study law. He was willing to back me all the way, you know, to law school. It would have meant going back to, I don't know, you know, with the new family. And I didn't quite relish law. See I didn't relish law at all. And I got this feeling I wanted to write for newspapers because we used to read so many black papers in Trenton. And so we used to get them every week. The New York Ace, this little paper come by mail called the Red Bank Echo. And that was put out by a guy who I became very friendly with later. A fellow named Clinton Brock. But he was a printer down there, and that paper, the New York Ace, and we used to even read the Chicago Defender which was about the biggest paper black paper read. Because we didn't know anything about the Afro then.

Q: What about the Courier?

Queen: The Pittsburgh Courier. There wasn't a whole lot reading of the Afro. So I kind of caught this kind of fever. And I knew that there were one or two black newspapers in Newark. And so that's what really drew me there. Not knowing how I'm gonna go in and get a job in a newspaper, you know.

Q: Let me start, focus on Newark by saying how would you describe Newark around 1937?
Coming into Newark how would you describe the city?

Queen: Dirty. A lot of dilapidated houses. All the black people lived on what they called the hill, Third Ward. And the only apparently decent housing up there at that time was the Prudential Apartments on Somerset Street. It was a high rise thing, didn't go much over eight floors. I understand they made it seven or eight floors because any higher than that they would have had to put elevators in. [Laughter] Boy, we've had some kind of life when we stop and look back over it.

Q: Did virtually all segments of the black community live in the Third Ward?

Queen: Yeah, mostly.

Q: The professional people as well as the non-professional people.

Queen: Yeah. Yeah. Because the Prudential Apartments brought about a resurgence of a certain breed of black people because they had these nice apartments, you know, and heat, and it became the thing. So you had a lot of pretty well to do black people move from Orange and Montclair come down to look and move into these new luxury apartments. Because they had out in the yard there they had tennis courts, and a nice scenic park with benches and everything. It was quite a pleasant surrounding. We used to have softball back in those. They ran from Montgomery Street all the way down to Raymond. Cross Spruce. And then it. They called them the Douglas Harrison Apartments. The ones up from Montgomery, yeah from Montgomery down to Spruce were called the Douglas Apartments, and the ones from Spruce to Waverly were the Harrison Apartments. And they ran from Somerset Street to Market. Across the street from these apartments were ninety percent junk. In other words these people had to look out their window on some hell hole.

Q: And when you say junk you mean?

Queen: Junky houses.

Q: Okay. All right. So you've got this apartment complex that's attracting middle class black people, but surrounding it are, certainly across the street, are these dilapidated houses.

Queen: Yeah. Not all of them. But there was nothing in the neighborhood like nice homes and all.

Q: And your description of Newark being a dirty place. I just want to be clear. Does this apply to the city at large or is this a reference mainly to the areas?

Queen: To the areas.

Q: Okay, the areas where the black community resided.

Queen: And you would find little pockets that had been there for years and they had made the surroundings rather decent. But there were few families like that, created nice houses.

Q: Now you're saying outside of the Third Ward.

Queen: Outside of the Third Ward.

Q: Okay. But the greatest concentration of black people was in the Third Ward.

Queen: You see you get to, go out on Belmont Avenue, Clinton, Clinton Avenue, and across Clinton Avenue at the time the only black face you would find was a domestic. And that was almost like a sudden switch. You had the black people living right up to Clinton Avenue. And there were a lot of whites lived on Clinton Avenue. Not only were they white, but they were all Jews.

Q: Okay.

Queen: They were all Jews. Because all of them churches in Newark were all synagogues. All the black churches were synagogues, except something like St. James. Even my old church, Bethany.

Q: Bethany Baptist.

Queen: Yeah. Had been, I think Bethany had been a synagogue. I found a story I did on Bethany and I got it for you if you want it.

Q: Okay. That's excellent.

Queen: That's a story of 100th anniversary.

Q: So this is the Newark that you found coming in in 1937. We'll come back to this because some of the questions I'll be asking will take us back to that period. All right. You're coming into Newark in search of employment in the newspaper business. Tell us a little bit more about that. Were you successful?

Queen: Not right away. No cause actually the first job I got, the very first job I got. The first job I got was playing piano.

Q: How did that come about?

Queen: Well, back in Trenton when my father first started practicing law, he was the only black lawyer in town. And people didn't know much about black lawyers. They didn't have no money. Town was like most of the cities at that time. People weren't making any big money or nothing, but they had always had trouble with the law in some kind of way even if as far as buying a house.

So he had quite a few clients, and one of the clients one day backed a truck up to our house and gave us a piano.

Q: Was this in lieu of?

Queen: In lieu of money.

Q: Okay. So this is payment for services rendered.

Queen: That's right. So my sister and I we both learned to play that thing by ear. And I got to play so I could play the hell out of it. And I actually got some little jobs in Trenton before I moved away playing piano.

Q: What kind, what kinds of places?

Queen: Well, the places I got jobs in Trenton was some people would have a little house party and I used to share those jobs with a little guy in Trenton named Ski Jackson, a little hump backed man. And then I got a pretty good steady job up on Ray Street in Trenton at a housewares party. I was only about sixteen, seventeen years old.

Q: Were these places serving liquor?

Queen: Yeah. They were serving liquor. But I could play up some piano. And so I was banging away and play those slow blues jazz and all that kind of stuff. And my mother got a little leery of it. And she said, now who runs this place. I said, well, a lady in Maine. A lady in Maine. And who comes to the party? I said well she's got a lot of, and this, and so and so. Well, you tell her that this is your last night. This Saturday you tell her is going to be your last night. So I told her, I said, I can't come no more. So she hired Ski Jackson. And you know that Trenton used to have a paper called the Trenton State Gazette, a morning paper. And finally, the week after I left, the

State Gazette come out and the police had raided the house and said, even took the piano player down, Ski Jackson.

Q: So you narrowly escaped being arrested. And you were under age.

Queen: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I was under age when I played.

Q: So your mother, thanks.

Queen: She said I smelled a rat.

Q: She smelled a rat, yeah.

Queen: But when I got to Newark, I picked up the paper. I really didn't go right straight out looking for a newspaper job. Cause I got a wife and a family. I really didn't even know where to start, but I knew I had to get some kind of job. So I picked up the Newark Evening News and looked down the want ads. In those days, race was specified, whether it was chauffeur, colored chauffeur, colored this, colored that.

Q: So the papers would have under chauffeurs a certain category --

Queen: Oh yeah.

Q: -- for colored chauffeurs.

Queen: Yeah. Colored chauffeurs. It would say chauffeur and it would have in parenthesis colored. So I was looking down this thing and I came to, happened to see piano player. And the jobs, there was a whole list of them that said piano players, and most of them had colored behind them. So I grabbed both the first one and the last one and I went down. I said, you know, if I

could play for these people in Trenton at their parties I sure can play at these places. And I went down to a place called the Traveler's Tavern, down the end of Broad Street in Newark, just before you go over the skyway coming out of town. That tavern's still there. Only they have built streets around it. I don't know what it is now, but some black people own it, but at that time a white guy owned it.

Q: This is on Broad Street.

Queen: On Broad Street. The last stop.

Q: Is it on the, as you're going out of Newark.

Queen: As you're going out it's on the left.

Q: Left, okay.

Queen: Cause the right you go to Vreelinhisen Avenue.

Q: Right. Okay.

Queen: Well, I went in this place, and I had the ad with me, and I know that the guy was sitting there. He had his hat on the back of his head. And I told him I said, I saw this ad. Well, he said, just play us something. There was a piano sitting up there and that was damndest out of tune piano I had ever run into. And I sat there and played some numbers on it. And he said, oh, you play good enough for these bimbos that come in here. He said, it's seven nights a week, one dollar a night. And he said sometimes you get tips. Well, I had had a job in Trenton as a chauffeur, private chauffeur for seven dollars a week. So here I walked into this. So I told my wife I got a job, but it's nights. But I stayed on that job down at that Traveler's Tavern for a good six months. And they had these B girls they called them, Bar girls, that would entice guys to drink.

Q: Now let me interrupt to ask this. Was this a bar, was the clientele black or white?

Queen: White. Yeah, white. And so I played there, and these girls would talk to these old white guys in there, and rub their head, and tell them, oh, give this colored boy some money.

Q: Would they actually use that? They would refer to you as a boy?

Queen: Yeah. Give this boy some money. So some nights I walked out of there with six or seven dollars which meant I made eight dollars. So it wasn't too bad a thing, you know.

Q: And these are depressions years, of course.

Queen: That's right. That's right. Because I'm talking about, wasn't too long after that I was working on the WPA.

Q: This was also in Newark.

Queen: That's right.

Q: Let me. We'll come back to this. But just let me, there was something that you said about Trenton that I wanted to get you to elaborate on. You said your father was a lawyer and that black people had a lot of difficulties with the law. And you said something about buying a house. What did you mean by that?

Queen: A lot of them had bought homes and they had never had any legal representation in buying it.

Q: Okay.

Queen: So my father, I imagine, about eight percent of the black people that bought homes back then, he'd help negotiate their deal. And every church, every church in Trenton that bought a building he helped negotiate. I've got a picture here somewhere where they're negotiating a deal for the.

Q: Okay. I wanted to make certain that I picked up on that. Okay, so we're back to Newark now. So you're working at this tavern. You're making officially seven dollars a week.

Queen: Officially seven dollars a week.

Q: But getting additional money. And the clientele was white. What kind, was working class.

Queen: Yeah. It was just bums.

Q: Any particular ethnic group represented? Irish.

Queen: Down there no.

Q: It was a cross-section. I'm just curious. You said these were B girls.

Queen: Bar girls they called them.

Q: Bar girls. Was there any prostitution involved?

Queen: I don't know.

Q: You don't know.

Queen: I knew some girl made a guy buy a car for her. He came in one day, look out the

window. You bought me a car? All that kind of stuff going on. But then after that, I got some other jobs in Newark that I shared with playing the piano. I must have played piano in about, at least six places in Newark. Each one paid a little better than the other. And I played piano when I was working on the WPA. But that was a mistake.

Q: Tell us about the WPA. What did you do with the WPA? Tell us first of all what is the WPA, what does that stand for?

Queen: Works Progress Administration. Under Roosevelt. That was the first time people on welfare earned money. And they paid you about thirty-three dollars every two weeks. So you made money. Which meant you could go out and buy what you want, you didn't have to take no slips and things like that. And so while I was doing that, I still played piano.

Q: What did you do for the WPA?

Queen: Oh. The first job I got with the WPA was up there on Belmont Avenue, where we had the contract. Streets, street repairs.

Q: Okay, the work crews. I assume all black.

Queen: No.

Q: Oh they weren't. What other groups were there?

Queen: Oh every group you could think of.

Q: Irish, Italian. So these were the work crews.

Queen: There wasn't any racial separation. Of course, there wasn't anybody else.

Q: You said you were lifting.

Queen: We moved the car tracks off of Belmont Avenue, which is now Irving Turner Blvd.

Q: What happened a bus route?

Queen: Oh yes.

Q: So you were moving the tracks, and eventually you paved the street.

Queen: Initially yeah.

Q: How long were you with the WPA?

Queen: I guess a good three or four years. Cause I got ahold of some guy who had an inside or something and he got me transferred out to Branchwood Park. In the summertime, we would work in the park. We weren't doing nothing much out there to earn that money. Raking up stuff and all that kind of thing. And then I got into politics with one of my father's friends, an attorney, who was giving out jobs, and through him I got an inside job. And this job was a maintenance man in the better housing bureau, which was one of the phoney things, you know. Supposed to improve some build up of the housing situation. But I got a job as a maintenance man there, but I was listed as a clerk. Another black guy working in there, Bennie Maddox, he was listed as a clerk too, but he was a receptionist at the door and all that kind of stuff. But anyway, it was an inside job. And it paid four dollars more than being out in the street.

Q: And you didn't have to do that much work. Was that the last WPA job you had?

Queen: Yeah, that was the last WPA job.

Q: And now we're getting into the early 40s, and at the same time, you're still playing the piano.

Queen: Yes.

Q: You're doing this in the evenings?

Queen: Yes. Been so long that I did these things that I'm trying to dovetail.

Q: But newspaper work is still.

Queen: Still a little, because I hadn't made no connections.

Q: Okay. All right. You said you were sharing playing piano at some of these places. Explain what you meant by that.

Queen: Oh well, I meant that I continued to play piano at night whenever I could get a job. And I got, I had two jobs that were very good. One of them was right out off of Bellevue Avenue. I had to leave that place one night, I went out the side door, I always kept my hat on top of the piano. And they had such a big fight in there and they kind of surrounded me cause some girl came over and wanted to be singing with me. And putting her hands all on my suit and her husband came out of the bathroom and he knocked the living hell out of her. I looked around and all I could see was her feet over the top of the table. And some other guy went to hit him and they had a free for all in there.

Q: So once her husband hit her, then another guy hit her husband.

Queen: I said the next blow will come to this black dude. I grabbed my hat.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Q: Now you were saying, you were describing this incident that occurred one night.

Queen: Yeah. I came out of there, and I saw a 29 trolley going north to Montclair and I jumped on it although I was going south. I just got the first trolley I could, and I went all the way out to Upper Montclair on this trolley. When I saw one coming down, I just got off and went over and caught the one going back. And I always remember when the trolley went back south, I looked down the street to see if there was anything going on.

Q: Was there?

Queen: No. No sir. I just heard a lot of noise. See, that was a place where Jews ran the tavern, and mostly their customers are Irish. And right down, the girl to sit down to play.

Q: Her husband.

Queen: Yeah. He wouldn't let her wouldn't let her and be like a princess then.

Q: Okay. He was just singing.

Queen: She had her arms around my, you know, my shoulder and her face down on my shoulder and singing. And I never forget it. Sarah, I told you to sit down. And that was what all he said.. But that was some free for all. And sometimes customers. You see this? Yeah, I see this. And he turned around and smacked some guy in the back of the house.

Q: This is the same incident?

Queen: Yeah part of the same.

Q: This is a part of the free for all.

Queen: A part of the free for all.

Q: This is the same. Arguing, flirting with you or come on to you.

Queen: No.

Q: This was the only time.

Queen: Yes.

Q: What about, obviously there were other piano players that also. Could you talk about this?
Did you get a sense of them, that they had?

Queen: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Q: Come on to them?

Queen: Yeah. Sure. Some of the girls I could have, you know.

Q: Okay.

Queen: You know. I remember.

Q: Wait a minute. You're saying that despite the fact that they didn't necessarily and come and approaching you, nonetheless, if you had been a little bit more aggressive you could have done?

Queen: Yes. Then I would.

Q: And you were aware of situations where there were these affairs between these bar girls, these

white bar girls and black piano players?

Queen: Yeah.

Q: Okay. So you didn't go back to that?

Queen: I didn't go back to get my money. I didn't even go back to get my money. Now, I'd only been working about three nights so I didn't lose that much.

Q: Okay.

Queen: Then the last job I got playing piano was very interesting. It was a place down on Park Place. You would go downtown at the park at the military park downtown Newark. And the Public Service Building used to be there. I don't whether they tore that stuff down or not. But anyway, behind this park was Park Place, and there was a bar back there. A woman owned it. White lady owned it. And I got a job playing there. And this woman paid me pretty good. And it was every night. Everything was every night. And I know this one time I begin to see some unusual characters, these are all whites, for about two or three days, two or three nights, some guys I had never seen them come in before because I knew most of everybody who came in. And they didn't particularly pay any attention to the piano player, but they came in and they looked funny. Don't you know in about three or four days after I seen those guys, remember the story of Dutch Schultz, the gangster? He was shot right over there about a half a block from this bar. The barbershop. And right after he was shot, I didn't see these guys no more. Now I kept playing there.

Q: Let me before you go any further, let's. Tell me what your thinking is about all this.

Queen: Oh my thinking is that these guys were brought in by. See, Dutch Schultz had announced that he was going to come over and take over the numbers. They was from, oh, they was big. I

can't think of his name right now. He was a big gangster there in Newark. And he ran all the.

Q: What was he, Italian, Irish?

Queen: No. He was a Jew.

Q: He was a Jew.

Queen: Yes. And Schultz announced that he was going to come over and take over the Newark, the town of Newark. But that was his last gesture, cause they took him out.

Q: So these men.

Queen: I deduced that myself.

Q: That these men?

Queen: Were connected with some of these guys.

Q: From Schultz.

Queen: No, not from Schultz, the guys from Newark.

Q: Okay. And they were there in this bar to what? To?

Queen: Just sizing up things. They were just getting set.

Q: Okay.

Queen: I never seen them before those guys, and I never seen them after. At that time, these were days when.

Q: Okay. So the kingpin or the head of the criminal --

Queen: The mob.

Q: Underworld, yeah mob, was Jewish at that time. And Dutch Schultz was coming over to muscle him out.

Queen: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Q: And several days after you saw these guys, and you felt Dutch Schultz, and he was killed?

Queen: Yeah. Bumped him off right there in Newark.

Q: In Newark.

Queen: Yeah it was a half block away. That's the way I got, it seemed as though I played for this lady, and she was a nice woman. And one night I said to her, I said, you know, I said I'm gonna have to leave because, I said, it seems to me if I continue to any more time, I'm not going to go into journalism. She said, well, you want more money. You want me to cut the nights down? I said, no. I said, just got to go. That's the way I felt. Hit that piano key one more time, I was gonna blow. And see my wife got this organ out there, I only tried it about three or four times. I could play on it. .

Q: You just had to close that.

Queen: So anyway that was that. Now see, I can't tell you in the regular part of things. But

eventually going around to the bar, clubs that were available at the time in Newark trying to keep my family going. I finally met people who were affiliated with the black press. At some of the bars and things. And I left at the old, this was Afro Club because I eventually tended bar there and did a whole lot of things. I left the club. [interruption to talk to someone who asks if they would like something]

Q: Now, you were saying, before you, you were saying that eventually you left the clubs. It appears that when you come into Newark in the late 30s, that survival, work, employment opportunities for black men, just as a group, just playing piano in white bars.

Queen: Well, that was one of thing.

Q: I'm curious were there any black bars where they had black piano players.

Queen: Yeah. Yeah. But most of us those black places, they had little band. Yeah. They had the black places were going to have a little combination band. Yeah that was then. Have you seen that book?

Q: Yes. I haven't gone through it thoroughly. This is Barbara Kukla's book.

Queen: Yeah. You don't have to.

Q: But they had black. That's interesting, the bars owned by whites would hire black piano players.

Queen: Oh yeah.

Q: And you were the only musician there?

Queen: Yup.

Q: What sort of music did you play?

Queen: Everything. I got to the place where I could play all of them German numbers, white people would start.

Q: Polkas and.

Queen: Can you play this? And I said, well, start singing it. And they would start singing it and I just catch up with them, you know. And that's why they liked me in those places. Cause I played anything that they called for. As long as they start singing, I said, I think I know it. I said, start singing it.

Q: In addition to that, what did you play? Sort of like jazz pieces, the blues, did you play blues?

Queen: Oh yeah. I could play anything.

Q: And then the popular music of the day?

Queen: Right.

Q: Ballads and that kind. Whose style did you?

Queen: Well, I used to, could imitate Claude Hopkins. I got good on the piano, there's not question about that.

Q: Okay. That's good.

Queen: I could imitate Claude Hopkins, Earl Hyde, and make sometimes, I'd ask the people guess who this. And I could also do, there was some white piano player used to do a number. It was very rapid. And I used to imitate him. And they would say, oh yeah, we know who that is. So and so. The only person I could never imitate, of course, and nobody could was Duke Ellington. Claude Hopkins I could do.

Q: How about Eddie Beechers?

Queen: Oh no. No. I didn't bother with him.

Q: He was a piano player?

Queen: That's right. I played some of that music, but not to imitate him.

Q: So this is the kind that you played sort of a broad range of.

Queen: Broad range.

Q: And some of these ethnic songs.

Queen: That's right.

Q: To more traditional, popular. And were you in close contact with other black piano players?

Queen: You know, I knew quite a few of them that were out there playing, you know, like I was.

Q: Okay. Were you also in contact with some of the members of these bands that were playing in black?

Queen: Yes. Yes. Cause I would go to these bars.

Q: Okay. Was there a union?

Queen: Huh?

Q: Was there a union?

Queen: No.

Q: No union.

Queen: There was a union, but it was not local bars. No. No. The black guys were in the union. They had a colored union.

Q: Yeah. The musicians, I think, had a musicians union.

Queen: Yeah. It was quite a few years before they all joined up.

Q: Okay. So there was a local musicians union in Newark for black musicians.

Queen: Oh yeah. I never got into it.

Q: So, was there a kind of a --

Queen: Camaraderie?

Q: Camaraderie. Yes. Among musicians.

Queen: Yeah. Most of them, the guys knew I was playing. You know. And I knew them because there came a time when I helped a guy manage a band up there in Newark, and he had a piano player that used to get drunk, and two or three times I played in that band. Just played for this guy.

Q: All right. We might touch on this music again. But anyway, it was through your playing at these various bars and so forth, that you came to know someone who was important in the black newspaper business?

Queen: No. That wasn't from playing, that was from just going.

Q: From just going.

Queen: Places.

Q: And who was this man again?

Queen: Brent Clark.

Q: Who was he?

Queen: He was the owner of the New Jersey Guardian. And I didn't even know it at the time. It was one of those nights when you get into hot political questions, the racial thing, anything, you know. We just be discussing. And old Brett he says, I like the way you think. I like the way you think for a young man. So I said, who is this man. Well, that's Brent Arclay. He's owner of the Guardian. The New Jersey Guardian was a, it was only eight pages, and it was, there were eight pages, and it was a pretty good paper. And so I met him another night. See, I didn't say anything to him that night cause I knew he came there all the time and drank. And I said, hey, Mr. Clark, I said, there any chance of me breaking into that business of yours. He said, yes. Yes. Yeah, you

can sell papers. How do you mean? He said, you distribute, get yourself a newspaper route. I said, well, Mr. Clark, and he tell me to come over one day. And the first man I met when I walked in Clark's office was Irving Turner. Cause Irving Turner was his advertising man. Irving Turner, a boy named Louis Hicks.

Q: Louis.

Queen: Louis Hicks, he's dead, like Irving. Melvin Johnson and a girl from Nutley who was a clerk. We didn't have it. That was all. So he, I didn't have no car. Mr. Turner. So he took me with him to distribute these papers. .

Q: Who took you?

Queen: Brett Clark.

Q: So Brett Clark was distributing his own?

Queen: His own papers. Yeah. Back of his car, all piled up, his papers. We'd go all to Nutley and Montclair, and drop off these papers. And to those newsstands, beauty parlors, barbershops, restaurants, and one of your biggest outlets was newsboy. Newsboys, they were all around. I got to know the route pretty good. And I can't think of how I came to have my own route. I can't remember how I come to this car business. But apparently I must have acquired a car and was able to do it. I can't remember.

Q: Okay. Before you figured out something about Mr. Clark. I take it he was an older man..

Queen: Oh yes.

Q: How old was it?

Queen: At that time, at that time, it was probably around six years old.

Q: Did you know anything about him, his background?

Queen: Well, I learned later they used bootleg liquor down in the Gulf of Mexico. He and some other guy in Newark who had a lot of money. They didn't like each other. Somebody told me later that both of them were down there doing the same thing. They had been rivals down there off the west coast of Florida. Running liquor across the Gulf, and they finally come off. He was like a hustler. Man was a hustler. But he knew there was something in this newspaper thing. Because he had his own ideas about what black people should be thinking, what they should be doing, or what should be done for them. And through his newspaper, Clark was the first guy that I ran into that could realize the value of the writing of a good story on anything and take it down. The man he had, Melvin Johnson, working for him was the city editor. And so when we started going over the routes, I wasn't coming up with no more or no less than I was playing piano. See. Cause the end of the week profits would go in his pocket and he might give me five dollars and he might give me ten dollars. See?

Q: So there was no set amount?

Queen: No. No. No set amount. Irving Turner was supposed to be getting commission off his ads, but Irving Turner was out there distributing papers too. Everybody in there was distributing newspapers. No matter what office you had, you were a distributor.

Q: So he was the owner, Mr. Clark was the owner, the distributor, the editor.

Queen: And he also got ads. Everybody got ads. Even I got ads.

Q: Where was this paper located?

Queen: On West Market and Wilshire. I have pictures of it. What's left of it before they tore it down.

Q Before we go any further, describe briefly some of the other, your colleagues. You've given us some information on Mr. Clark.

Queen: Who.

Q: Irving Turner.

Queen: Irving Turner. Irving was a hustler, and he called himself sometimes, he wanted to sing. He wanted to be a singer. And every time we would be out at some bar somewhere and there was a band playing, Irving would pass a note up to the MC that there's been a request for Mr. Turner to sing. And sometimes they'd say god damn, and Turner would send a note up there again.

Q: What about his writing, his journalistic skill?

Queen: None of them had journalistic skills. I'm just a beginner myself. But none of these. I found out later. I didn't know then. You know, I didn't know then because I'm not. Melvin was supposed to be the city editor. So when I got finished delivering my own papers, I found out that people always wanted to put something in the paper. And they would give me little write ups on any kind of piece of paper, and I would take it in and give it to Vivian Harris, and she would type it up and put in the paper. And the next week I would sell more papers. You see? So that's how I got wise to that part of the business. But I remember the first story I did on a major, well, to me they were major events. This guy helped us, a white guy, repair elevators. So an elevator fell on him, killed him. This was my first news story. And it was on the front page, it was going on the front page. Melvin said, oh boy, this is just what we need this week. So he picked my story and I wrote it. And I don't know from nothing. And he picked up a pencil and he started rubbing out stuff. I said, well, I guess this has got something to do with editing. As far as I know, this had to

do with editing. And he was rubbing that. So the paper came out that week with the story in it, and with all these lines crossed out. He never said why he was doing it. So come to find out coming out, I then began to read other papers to find out for myself how they're doing this thing. So to give you an example of Melvin. He then went on to politics, ran for State Assembly and all that stuff.

But I went to the Afro in Newark. Melvin came over one day, and, of course. You know Melvin. I said, yeah, yeah, yeah. He said, yeah, we go way back. He's going to do a political column for you. He said, I'm going to turn it over to you. So she turned the column over to Queen every week, and he'll take care, you know, edit it and all that stuff. I said, this is real challenging. Because he had all that drive. But he could not. He didn't know what he was doing, but he was. Of course, I didn't know. I think I'll write that up.

Q: Was this, since we're talking about the people in the newspaper editing, what sort of background did the people, did the backgrounds vary?

Queen: No journalistic background.

Q: Okay.

Queen: Most of them started from scratch like I did.

Q: Self-taught.

Queen: Yeah. And picked it up along the way. You were lucky if you got in the hands of somebody who knew something. I think I told you that the editor of the New Jersey Daily News.

Q: No. I don't think you did. I don't think you did.

Queen: Yeah. He had been up to school with us. I'll tell you about that.

Q: Okay. We'll come back to that. So you actually start by being a distributor and going around with Fred Clark. And then people would give you stories and you would hand these in, and eventually you started writing these up?

Queen: Yeah.

Q: You started writing these stories yourself. That's how you started.

Queen: Because eventually when I got my, got the car, had access to the car. I don't even know what the car was. Couldn't tell you. But I know I used to take papers all down to the, down to Freehold, Asbury, Belmar, Matawan, New Jersey. Down there where my grandmother used to live and we used to spend summers. And I went to Matawan one time and stopped and got a haircut there. And the guy said somebody had left a birthday party notice they wanted to put in the paper. Now this guy, everytime I would take him ten papers, when I'd go back, he'd give me back seven or eight of them. They'd give them credit on them. Well, I put this in the paper next week, and I went back there were ten papers gone.

Q: So you explain, tell me the point that you're making.

Queen: Well, all you need to do is service these people with news and they'll buy the paper. News about them. Then they go into the other news. Then they find out what's going on in other places. And to me that's one of the basic tenets of our papers, was that you give the people news of what they're doing, and they will eventually find out what other people are doing.

Q: You would say this was one of the major reasons for the appeal of the black newspaper?

Queen: Yes.

Q: They carried news from people in the community.

Queen: In the community. Yes.

Q: You mentioned a lady, Vivian?

Queen: Vivian Harris.

Q: Vivian Harris. Tell me something about her. How unusual was it to have a woman working on a newspaper at that time?

Queen: Well, as far as I know, I didn't know how unusual it was. She was a secretary.

Q: She wrote no articles, she did no reporting?

Queen: She used to type stuff. But Vivian lived in Nutley. Member of a whole big family up there. And she eventually married a guy from Kearny, New Jersey by the name of John Pullen. And Pullen studied law and became a lawyer in Washington, D.C. And that's where they moved to Washington. [Interruption]

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

Q: All right. This is a continuation of the interview of Mr. Robert Queen. Today's date is December the twenty-eighth, 1995. This is taking place at the home of Mr. Queen which is 276 High Street, in Darby, Pennsylvania. My name, the interviewer is Giles R. Wright. Mr. Queen, we were just beginning to get into a discussion of your beginning days of your career as a newspaper journalist. And I'd think I'd asked you something about one of the ladies or lady who worked with you, another colleague of yours, Vivian Harris.

Queen: Vivian Harris.

Q: And I was asking you what, and you said she was a secretary.

Queen: Right.

Q: I'm just curious. Were there any black female reporters or journalists in those days?

Queen: Yeah.

Q: There were.

Queen: Yup.

Q: What were their? In Newark?

Queen: In Newark?

Q: What were their names and who were these people?

Queen: There was Lillian Hunt. She was a reporter and social editor of the New Jersey Herald News. Sallie Cook.

Q: As you tell us, as you give us these names, if you can recall something about, to sort of flesh these individuals out, is there anything that you remember about Lillian Hunt?

Queen: Yeah. Lil was the, she was the social, primarily social writer. She went out on all kinds of stories. We all did. And this idea of departmentalizing reporters went out the window in the black press in those days. Because any day you might be obliged to write on something. There was no specialty in it. No specialty. Unless you got into a certain groove of reporting. Where Sallie Cook was one.

Q: So Lillian Hunt worked for the New Jersey Herald News.

Queen: So did Sallie Cook.

Q: Sallie Cook as well. Okay. And they covered all kinds of different assignments.

Queen: All kinds of assignments. Mostly social.

Q: Mostly social. Meaning the different social clubs and weddings.

Queen: Right. That kind of stuff.

Q: Anniversaries. Things like that. Anything about these people, or these individuals, that was noteworthy?

Queen: No, Lil was a very attractive girl. And.

Q: Where was she from? Just curious.

Queen: She was from Box Hollow. Still there.

Q: Still there? Okay. So this is certainly someone that we should.

Queen: Oh yeah. Yeah. She told, I only learned from her not long ago that it was the same Marvin Johnson that hired her.

Q: No kidding.

Queen: Because she was working in a restaurant up in East Orange as a waitress. Melvin, I guess

asked her did she want to write for a paper.

Q: Now I see something about Melvin Johnson. Okay, so he hired her.

Queen: He hired her.

Q: And she was a waitress beforehand? And he just offered her a job?

Queen: Yeah. He offered her a job, and she became very good.

Q: Was she? But again, on the job training.

Queen: Yeah.

Q: Would you say most of the black journalists at that day had good writing skills? Generally.

Queen: Yeah, generally they did. Generally they did.

Q: What about Sallie Cook? Where was she from?

Queen: Sallie, I think was from Newark. She had a brother who, I think her brother used to work for the Guardian too. His name was Marcus.

Q: Marcus.

Queen: Marcus Cook. And I imagine that's how she got her job. Cause when I got over to the Herald News, Lil and Sallie Cook were already writing.

Q: What about Melvin Johnson? Tell me something about him. Where was he from?

Queen: I couldn't tell you.

Q: What sort of person was he?

Queen: Flamboyant. Everything done with a flourish. And he liked to make public speeches, which is unusual for a newspaper man. But he had got deep into politics. Got deep into politics.

Q: Let me follow up on that. How would you, is there any sort of any common characteristic personality trait that you attribute to black journalists of this day? Did they tend to all be flamboyant?

Queen: No. No. Most of them were rather cool people.

Q: Rather cool people.

Queen: Oh yeah. The only exception would be Melvin. Irving Turner. Other than that, you wouldn't know they were around other than they were doing their job, you know, their work. We had one man who started over in Jersey, but he didn't start with me and I didn't start with him to round up. I think he used to work for Fred Clark too. But he wound up with the New York Amsterdam News. And he was there for about twenty-five or thirty years. That is Carl D. Lawrence. Carl Dunbar Lawrence. And he went to the Amsterdam, and he was one of the first black newsmen from Jersey to actually become. Amsterdam News was a member of the American Newspaper Guild. So theirs was under the influence of the unionization, and made good money. But he was over there for years.

Q: Was he a native New Jerseyan?

Queen: I don't know that.

Q: But you say for the most part the black journalists were not flamboyant.

Queen: No.

Q: You made a comment about Melvin that he wants to make public speeches.

Queen: Yeah. Yeah nobody would want to do that but Melvin Johnson. Because he was politically minded.

Q: Okay.

Queen: He'd jump on political bandwagons and made what money he could out of politicians and everybody else.

Q: Let me ask you some questions about Irving Turner. His name just came up. Tell us about Irving Turner.

Queen: Irving was a good friend of mine. And we eventually wound up staying in the same rooming house. But Irving came from Red Bank, New Jersey. And he was a cousin to Count Basie.

Q: He was a native of.

Queen: I think he was a native of Red Bank. He and Count Basie were cousins. And he had a way of taking people over to meet Count Basie when his band was playing down at the famous Door down on, taking guests into the famous Door. And when they'd bring the bill around, he'd say see the Count. [Laughter]

Q: Did he ever take you over?

Queen: No. No. I'll tell you about it. He said my cousin. But Irving, he was, I did a story on Irving. I got it here somewhere. I'll give it to you.

Q: How long ago was this?

Queen: It was the last couple of years, couple of years. I did it for the Prospective Magazine. For the magazine. I did a story on who was Irving Turner. So a lot of people didn't know who he was. How he got to be where he was. But he was this kind of a guy. Snowed heavy. Deep snow. And there was a law in Newark where you had to shovel your front walk. Irving goes up to Fourth Street and up along Livingston Street in Newark, and sees all of this snow out there. And goes into the headquarters and asks the sergeant in charge did he have a shovel, have a snow shovel. And he said, yeah, we got it right here. Well, take it out. I said I don't know whether they want to do the snow right now. And he said, well, I'm not going to do it and you're gonna put somebody out there to do it or you're against the law. [Laughter]

Q: Now who would do the shoveling?

Queen: The cops. He'd just say do you got a shovel. No, no. He'd put it off so they're gonna do it.

Q: So he was very aggressive.

Queen: They had a situation down where the new highway comes over downtown Newark. There was a section down in there where black people. You know where the highway that comes and bends around take you to the George Washington Bridge. Well, down under that section there were some black people lived in a little street they called it an alley. And they told the people they'd have to get out of there at a certain time. And nobody paid any attention to them. And Turner was on there and went up to City Hall and told the people. That they'd have to give them a month to get out of. He wasn't a public official then. He was writing for newspaper. So he went

down there and he saved them people from getting put out.

Q: Sort of a crusader?

Queen: Yeah. He was really a crusader. See, I really wasn't there when he became.

Q: You said, you mentioned a street, street named for him. That's been done recently?

Queen: No. That's been quite a few years now.

Q: Can you take us back now to his time as a journalist. What would you say? Would he cover a whole range of stories?

Queen: Oh yeah. He did the same as all of us did.

Q: Okay. What sort of distinguished, anything sort of distinguished his career?

Queen: No. No. Nothing. If there was, I can't remember.

Q: What he did he do to parlay or show an interest in involvement in politics

Queen: Yeah. Yeah. I would say that's a fact. He parlayed that into. But he was always, in his writing, he was always writing about a cause. What they're doing to the black man. It wasn't too hard for him to win the favor of the people in politics.

Q: How well known were these journalists, you included?

Queen: We were well known.

Q: In the community. So that if you went into a church gathering, people would know you.

Queen: They'd know you there. They would know you were there. You would run into people who were trying to get points over on things.

Q: So they would approach. They would know that you were there to cover a story and. So you would know this group. How many would you say there were? Let's just start in the early 40s, roughly how many black journalists are we talking about?

Queen: No more than, at any one given time, I would say no more twenty.

Q: And what were the newspapers at that time?

Queen: The Guardian, The Jersey Herald News, Afro-American. They didn't have any reporter at that time for the Courier. Most anything that happened over in Jersey, the Courier would send a New York Courier would come over to cover. They were big enough. But the Afro status in the district was a difference.

Q: And that was based in Newark.

Queen: Yeah.

Q: So around the early 40s, you stopped working for the WPA, you had been playing the piano, at the time you were playing the pianos in these bars, you meet Mr. Clark and eventually get involved with distribution of newspapers and eventually. How long did you stay with Mr. Clark? Describe those years.

Queen: Well, it couldn't have been over two or three years. Couldn't have been over two or three years. I think I better go start reaching for higher ground. By that time, I had met everybody

around. So I knew everybody who worked every place. So I began to make my pitch with the New Jersey Herald News.

Q: How would you describe the, what was important about those years?

Queen: In what way?

Q: What would you say would be the most important thing? How would you, what meaning would you attach to those years?

Queen: Oh. I don't know. The only meaning I, say they still were learning years for me. Because I never did think that I had it all down. Because I found out that this journalism business was bigger than all of us. Certain ways of doing things and certain ways of not doing them, and so I had to find out a lot of those things myself. Actually the first person that I encountered that kind of set me on more solid ground was the man who was the editor of the Herald News when I went over there. It was Lou Blackman. And he still lives up on Bloomfield Avenue in Montclair. On 21 Bloomfield Avenue.

Q: And what did he do?

Queen: He was the editor there at the Herald News.

Q: And how did he? Explain.

Queen: Yes. He, Lou was a graduate of [?]. And so he had a little more academic background than some of these other birds I had been affiliated with in my. Melvin and Clyde had never been nowhere but the school of hard knocks.

Q: So Blackman is an educated man, college trained?

Queen: Oh yeah. And he knew something about it, whether he worked on it the newspaper institute or what not, he knew something about it. And I never asked him, you know, how did he really get started in this thing. And it probably was that he might have had something to do with the [?] college paper. Because I knew years later that he had a grasp of it, you know. He had a grasp of it, and he trained me straight on a lot of things. Whenever he edited the copy, he would, sometimes he would talk to me. He was young because his nickname around Newark was the boy editor. Cause that's how young he was. And I praise Richard Clark for having giving him that responsibility. And Bill Huff was working there. And Phil Malloy was the office manager. And photographer. I was the bus driver. I don't know what bus it was at the time. Blackman left the paper. I was. The sportsman. He did all the sports and stuff. He had a leaning toward politicians. And then the girl in charge of the office clerks was Nellie Walstrom, who later married a fellow named Fleming. And all them people are gone.

Q: So you come to the New Jersey Herald News.

Queen: Doing the same thing I did for Fred Clark.

Q: And this is in the mid-40s. And you start off with as a distributor not writing.

Queen: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Q: You had to almost in a sense repeat.

Queen: Repeat what I was doing over there. But I knew the ropes then. All I had to do was retrace some of my old steps. I had a car. So I was able to, only my area was much more widespread at the Herald News.

Q: How would you describe these newspapers. Obviously, they were rivals.

Queen: They called themselves rivals.

Q: Did they both have the same sort of journalistic style? Was there anything that distinguished one from the other?

Queen: No. No they weren't that diverse. Not really.

Q: You mentioned something about, earlier in the interview, that you learned things to do, and things not to do. I'm just curious, what were they?

Queen: Well, let me tell how that worked with me. Let's say there would be a major fire somewhere in the area. And you have two or three newspapers, daily papers, to cover it. Well, I would get the papers and I would sit down and analyze how each of these reporters, I said they're all not saying the same identical thing, which is. So I have to ascertain the fact that each has his own individual way of projecting the story or the facts surrounding the story. And none of these people in the black papers ever said anything about how you cover a story. I never yet had anybody, say, how you doing, how was it, what not. Short of journalism school and nobody went to journalism school. I don't know anybody back in those days that went to journalism school except for [?], and he was eighty years old.

Q: Yeah, George, was. He was on the, in fact, at that time he was the, I think he the oldest graduate of Rectors College or something.

Queen: Yes. So he was way late.

Q: Right. I understand. So you had, in other words, that was a part of the thing to do. Sort of develop your own way of covering writing.

Queen: Then I begin to watch the papers for everything. And I noticed the sports writers. One

paper cover a sporting event, and I almost do that automatically today.

Q: Now, when you refer to papers, you're talking about white papers?

Queen: Yeah. Yeah. They were my journalism school.

Q: Okay. I gotcha. I understand. And now what was things not to do. I'm just curious.

Queen: Well, to avoid libel, you know, to avoid libel and unnecessarily besmirching people innocently. You know, things along those lines.

Q: So you, getting back to the Herald News, initially you were a distributor of the paper. And then you.

Queen: I did the same thing I did over to Clark. Only I had a wider range this time. See, I would leave Newark, see the paper published on Essex Street in Orange, where the Orange Transcript was printed. They used to print the Herald News, the Bloomfield Times, the Nutley newspaper, a weekly paper, and we all dovetailed in the production process of this printer. Herald News was given so much time for two days. And when your deadline came to come off the production line, it's supposed to come off because they're already moving in the Bloomfield Times. You see. So it gives you a sense of urgency in that respect, to respect to deadlines and get things done. So in the meantime, I used to work up there with them, and I gained an awful lot of experience in newspaper production. Because they even gave us direction in typesetting. You know insofar as to make the print, make it with a crew sheet and look back and fill the print. I did a lot of that. That's how I had to gain experience. And I talked to a lot of white reporters over the years. They didn't have no more background. They didn't have no more background all they had was white. And the only journalism school in America that allowed blacks, what's that school out there, Lincoln University in Missouri.

Q: In Missouri. Yes.

Queen: One of the top black reporters in the country came from there. And I forgot his name because he was a. He put out a newsletter. And I used to think. Can't get away from it. And I used to read a lot of those newsletters. They would keep you abreast of the first hundred black journalists that were. What papers were they working with. So it was. Of course, when I stayed at the Herald News I had a much bigger range of operation. I would leave that print shop on a Wednesday afternoon. I think I had a Turner Coupe with a rumble seat. And I would have papers so that I couldn't hardly go out on my side. On the floor, and on the seats, and in the rumble seat I would have it full of papers. And the car sometimes, I would hit a bump and the car would hit the springs. And so, I would leave from there, and drive from the print shop, my first stop would be, first stop would be [?], and then I would start dropping off papers. Freehold, Long Branch, Matawan, through Monmouth County, Asbury Park.. Beauty shops, barbershops, newsstands, and one of the biggest newsstands in Asbury Park. Had a big store down there. They sold hundreds of black papers.

Q: Was he, he was hispanic you say?

Queen: Yes.

Q: An Afro-Cuban?

Queen: Cuban.

Q: And his name was?

Queen: Cuba Lopez.

Q: Lopez. Okay. And he was in Asbury Park.

Queen: Right on Springwood Avenue. And I'd drop papers off there. And Cuba also had a lot of newsboys. But now I had newsboys too on my route. Some out in the country. Out in the woods I had newsboys. And we would see, go down Long Branch. I think that's as far south in Monmouth County. So I would shoot back across the state to Hopewell, not Hopewell. You know, there was a town I would stop in on the way back across the state, and wound up in Bordentown.

Q: So you would sort of do a loop of down the shore and come back west. Come in west. Then eventually hit Newark. So you would come as far west as Bordentown.

Queen: Bordentown. And eventually I think I had some of Burlington.

Q: In Burlington City.

Queen: Started moving back north into Hamilton Township.

Q: Hamilton Township. All right. How about Trenton?

Queen: Oh yeah.

Q: Trenton. Okay.

Queen: Trenton was one of my.

Q: One of your runs there. Okay. You would be hitting these places on the way back.

Queen: On the way back. Wouldn't have nothing but returns of a few papers that had been distributed. And I would wrap it up in New Brunswick.

Q: So the end of.

Queen: Somebody else had Livingston.

Q: Okay.

Queen: So I used to do pretty good, you know, money wise. So that's how I got. Eventually. Herald News had a guy used to work.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

Q: All right you were at the.

Queen: Oh yeah. I can't get the sequence right. At the same time that Malcolm was editor I think the [Too low to hear] I said I've been doing most everything anyway at the print shop. [Too low to hear.] Fred was a big time politician. And Richard Martin, his brother, was the laid back of the pair. But their main business was the manufacture of new. And they almost become millionaires.

Q: And this was in?

Queen: In Jersey City.

Q: It was in Jersey City. Okay. All right. Produced and manufactured in Jersey City.

Queen: Jersey City on Community Avenue.

Q: Okay.

Queen: And so then we had press meetings for the Herald News. This will kill you. We'd go over

there, the whole staff from Newark, and go over there to Jersey City and go in this stinking hair grease factory and go in this back room with all of these cans of whatever they put in their hair grease. And they had glass jars on the floor with this stuff cooking, and it didn't have no modern applications to pour it in the can. And we'd be there having a press conference and they'd be there pouring this stuff in them orange colored cans. And they used to ship truck loads overseas. PX places.

Q: And this was like tuxedos, this was like.

Queen: Oh yeah.

Q: I wasn't familiar with.

Queen: Oh yeah, man. Leave your hair slick.

Q: Okay.

Queen: Yunod. Yeah, so one time we went over there with a complaint about some more money.

Q: And they were the owners.

Queen: Owners of the Herald News.

Q: And Blackman was simply the.

Queen: He was just the editor.

Q: An inter, I got it. And they were from?

Queen: Jersey City.

Q: They were from Jersey City. Which is very fair. Very fair. Natives of Jersey City?

Queen: No. No. They come from down Carolina somewhere.

Q: From Carolina.

Queen: Somewhere, I can't remember where.

Q: But very successful.

Queen: Oh yes, very successful. And Fred got close to Mayor, who is that guy.

Q: Hague, Frank Hague. .

Queen: Yeah, yeah. Because one of the Martin drivers got a ticket for speeding along the Henry Hudson Drive and the cop said, who are you. I work for Boss Martin. And he said who is Boss Martin. He said, well, he's my boss too. He said that's what Mayor Hague calls him, Boss Martin. So the guy said, well you want to watch that driving, but I said he was pretty powerful then with Mayor Hague.

Q: So these two brothers would be among the leading black businessmen in Jersey.

Queen: New Jersey, now. Because Richard told me. Bob, we only bought the Herald News really for prestige. I didn't even know what prestige was. Can't make up his mind. So we went over to talk about the possible increases in salaries. So Richard said, Bob, you explain the situation to us, please. He had this great book out and he opened it up. And he said, now, I'm gonna show you all the figures in this book. This side of the book where you see the figures in the black, it's Yunod Hair Products. The figures you see over here in red is the Herald News. He said, this is the goose that laid the golden egg. And he shut the book. [Laughter] And we looked at one

another and said wow. The probably had some funny.

Q: So you looked at one another.

Queen: Where do we go from here? Where do we go from here? This is it. So anyway, I guess, I don't ever remember getting a raise. I never remember getting over thirty-five dollars a week at the Herald News. So, and I didn't tell you even in those times when I was working for those papers, I made extra money driving a green cab at nights. I drove green cab at night for about five years. Not every night, but a lot of nights when I found out that there wasn't somebody coming in, there was always somebody who was out.

Q: So the owners said.

Queen: Yeah. Take the cab out and make yourself some money. At that time, the rides in Newark were fifty cents no matter where you were. So that's the only way I could keep going.

Q: What's the name of the cab company that you worked for?

Queen: Green Cab.

Q: Green Cab.

Queen: They're still there.

Q: Still here. Black company or white company?

Queen: Black company.

Q: Black company. Most of your clientele, passengers?

Queen: Both.

Q: Both. It was a black cab company that carried passengers of all.

Queen: Oh yeah. We got in the cab line down at the station, and the people didn't discriminate against us.

Q: So at the time that you were working as a journalist, you were --

Queen: I drove a cab.

Q: Driving a cab. Obviously to take care of your family. You had three children by this time.

Queen: Yeah.

Q: You had three children. Okay. Let me just ask you, I'm not certain that we finished discussing your career in journalism, but I think this might be an appropriate question to ask. Would you say that this period, let's say from the 30s to when, which was sort of maybe to the 50s, would be the golden era of black journalism?

Queen: When?

Q: When do you see black journalism, black newspapers beginning to decline and why in Newark?

Queen: Well, I begin to see the decline after, I don't know, it might have been when I was in Philadelphia.

Q: So this is much farther down the road. Okay, let's hold off on that question. And let's from

the Herald News, you eventually go to New Jersey Afro-American.

Queen: Afro-American.

Q: How long were you at the Herald News?

Queen: For about, I don't know. I'd say four or five years.

Q: This is getting close to the 50s. So around late 40s, 50s that you go to the Afro-American.

Queen: Let me get something straight here. I came to Philadelphia as the managing editor of the Philadelphia Independent in November, 1950.

Q: What did you go there for?

Queen: So that means, so that means that I left either the Afro or the Herald News. I'm not going to say because I can't get the chronology right.

Q: Did you go back to Newark after you worked in Philadelphia? Did you go back to Newark based newspaper?

Queen: After I was in Philadelphia, oh yeah.

Q: Okay. So.

Queen: But that was up the road.

Q: Okay. So you didn't work for the, did you work for the Afro before you went to Philadelphia?

Queen: Yeah.

Q: You worked for the Afro before you went to?

Queen: Yeah. I worked for the Afro up in Newark.

Q: Before you went to Philadelphia?

Queen: Yeah.

Q: So before you went to Philadelphia, you worked for the Herald News and the Afro.

Queen: And the Afro.

Q: You left, you left the Afro to go to Philadelphia to work?

Queen: The Afro had a big lay off. I think I was part of it. I was the shop steward. So the shop steward was the first to go so I got laid off. After that, after this lay off. I can't remember what I did journalistically. Other than I continued to keep up my contacts out on the newsbeat. Kept up my contacts out on the newsbeat, and I still drove a cab. Didn't play any more music. I still drove a cab. And I can't recall what I did, but what happened is keeping my contacts up, one day I went down to police headquarters, and the guy said, Bob, they don't know whether I'm fired or not cause I've been coming down there, you know, pretty regularly just to keep it alive. I don't know when I'm gonna get hired again.

Q: I hear you.

Queen: Yeah. So the captain said, Bob, you know we got a big story here this week. And I said well what's that. He said, well, you know, Viola Wells father was stabbed to death on Thirteenth

Avenue Presbyterian Church. So I didn't say nothing to nobody. There wasn't nobody from the Herald News there. There was nobody from the Afro there. And I'm not working for either one of them. So I get all of this stuff down. I said, well, who is the suspect. They said, well, we don't have no suspect yet. They said, they found this body up in Vauxhall. There was a real popular tavern up there everybody used to go to. They found this body out in the tavern backyard with an ice pick in him. Old man Wells was a nice, old man. And a little fellow too. You know, he wasn't no big man. But he was the, what in the back of the church do they call it.

Q: The treasurer.

Queen: Yeah. Yeah. What do they call him? Yeah.

Q: Deacon.

Queen: That's what he was. He handled the money. It was one of those that sold over months. And they went down and talked to the pastor, Reverend. You know something I can't remember names. They talked to the pastor. And the pastor, he was all upset and all. He hadn't seen him. That Sunday he announced in church that they found this body and looking for the suspect. And he said that they haven't made final services, he was gonna announce later when the services would be. In the meantime, Detective Carlton Morris, whose wife eventually married that famous councilman, Calvin West, who eventually married Councilman Harris' wife. Detective Norris, he told me, he said, well, we think we got the pastor.

Q: The pastor?

Queen: Said yeah. So they had checked out his story, and he told them he gone to a movie. So and so and so and so. And he even told them what movie it was and all that kind of stuff. But his brother-in-law came into headquarters saying that there was something very fishy about his car. He said Reverend borrowed my car the other night. And he said there must be blood spots. So

they found out that. So he had stabbed him in the church over money because he had threatened to expose him. Stabbed him, put an ice pick in him and dragged him out of there. So I had this story.

Q: And who was threatened to expose.

Queen: Elder Wells.

Q: Threatening to expose the minister or?

Queen: Yeah.

Q: The minister had been taking the money. And he was.

Queen: Elder Wells was going to expose him. And Norris said they confronted him and said Reverend and said, Reverend the honeymoon is over. . He said, where I coming from. I've got this story. I'm not working for either one of the papers. I know they don't have it yet. It's going to be in the daily papers, anyway, but there was nobody there from the Herald News or the Guardian. By that time the Guardian wasn't having nobody out anyway. And the Guardian, I guess, was just about on its way out. And I said got to do something with this. Got on the telephone, and the first paper I called up, I didn't call the Tribune, I called the Philadelphia Independent. I didn't know too much about the Independent. So I talked to Ralph Jones. I said, I got a good story out here. I said, you don't know me. I'm Bob Queen and I used to be with the Afro-American. I said, I'm not working for anybody now. And I got this story about the pastor of a Presbyterian Church who stabbed the elder to death in the church. He said, how soon can you get it to me? I said, I can get it to you tomorrow morning. So I sent that story down there to them. And the next week they come out with the story on. And after that, they asked me would I write a column for the North Jersey area because they had been interested in coming up that way anyhow. And so I did, and I got fifteen dollars a week for the column every week on top of what

else I was earning. It was about a couple of months later that they called me and would I come down to see them. And I was then, my previous wife who passed away. I told her about it. He said, oh, Mr. Queen, he says, we like what you've been doing for us, and we have a vacancy coming up here. Wonder if you would like to take it. They said we know your background with the Afro. And I said, well what does it consist of. He said we're asking you to be the managing editor of the Philadelphia Independent. This is the biggest paper in PPhiladelphia Yeah, yeah. I'll go in and sit there. So, this is something I have to give thought to. So I got to go back and I'll see you tomorrow morning. That be okay. So we got back and talked it over and I said, yeah, I'll take it. And they started me off I think at seventy-five dollars a week. It was, that's when I came to Philadelphia. 1958.

Q: So that was twenty years.

Queen: That occurred in, let's see, around 59. I think it was 59.

Q: You started. Equal number of years.

Queen: Then I got to the Courier. I knew that the Independent for me was a good. Anyway, because the man that owned it, he was very ill. He had to be picked up and carried by his chauffeur. And he had a young wife who was trying to run everything. I knew that I wasn't going to be around that long. But fate always played in the hand sometimes, you know. And Beverly Carter, who was at one time.

Q: Beverly Carter. Beverly Carter was ambassador to Tanzania.

Queen: That's him.

Q: This is the same person?

Queen: That's him. The same Beverly Carter. Beverly Carter, he was into that Republican Party and so was Mrs. Mahon. Along with Republican. Beverly got himself into some kind of deal because the Courier was having problems and they made him publisher. And Beverly, he hadn't even been successful, in the city for the Philadelphia Afro-American. He had worked over there, but he hadn't made no, created no waves. And they made him publisher. They made him the supreme big boss. So the first thing, and they had a guy there in charge of the Courier who was a big time publisher who owned all of the in Philadelphia, Auston Marsh.

Q: I know Auston Marsh. He's a lawyer. I think he went to Harvard or Yale.

Queen: Yeah. He owned everybody in the city, and he ran the Devine organization, Father Devine organization. He ran the Church of God of the Apostolic Faith.. Bishop C. F. Johnson. He ran that. Plus he was something with the deeds. He knew what every piece of property.

Q: Recorder of the deeds.

Queen: That's how the Devinities bought all of these buildings. With supposedly cash money. You know, he was related to. So he used the Courier to his advantage. Cause the girl who was his secretary there told me that when Father Devine married this light woman, but Norris called out to Pittsburgh and told them to hold the presses on the national edition because he got a story. And that was the story that the Courier broke. Because Norris engineered it all. But now, beyond that, the Courier was flouncing. And under Beverly Carter, but Beverly, the first thing he does is gets on the phone and calls me at the Independent. And tells me what the story is. He says, I wouldn't want you. I know you a long time. He said, you know, we're letting Norris go. I said, you are? I couldn't believe that. It would be like letting George Scholar go. Which they eventually had to do anyway cause he was out killing them. He said, we didn't want you to go to and help the Courier out of this mess. And I said, well, what was I supposed to do. He said, you're gonna be the editor of the Philadelphia Courier. So I resigned the Independent and I went to the Courier. And I stayed at the Courier until, I guess, must have been right after, I stayed at the

Courier until 64. Somewhere in there. By that time, the Courier was going broke and got to the place where the checking people wouldn't cash Courier checks. And then had to send money orders. Can you imagine the man running out there to get money orders to pay everybody because they wouldn't cash their checks. So, then they had their Ralph Matthews was working over at the Afro-American. And we got there. And they would pay us one week and wouldn't pay us the next. Skipping weeks and all that kind of stuff. So next I get a telephone call from a friend of mine down Baltimore. Said, Bob, you still at the Courier? I said, yes. He said, you know, we're moving Mattie, Ralph Matthews out. We're not going to send him back there. Cause he had had a couple of halfway strokes. He said, Mr. Carter wants you to go there and take over the Afro-American. And that's when I went back to the Afro. And I stayed at the Afro-American until 1984..

Q: So you didn't go back to Newark?

Queen: No.

Q: Once you left Newark, in the 50s, mid-40s.

Queen: Yeah, I was back in Newark. Oh yeah.

Q: As a newspaper.

Queen: Yeah. Yeah. With the Afro, I went back to Newark.

Q: So you, initially you worked for the Independent. Then for the Pittsburgh Courier. Once you leave Pittsburgh Courier.

Queen: Philadelphia Afro.

Q: Philadelphia Afro.

Queen: I landed in Newark. They sent me up to Newark on about the first or the second day of the riot.

Q: Oh, about 67. And that's where you stayed? So, you're away from Newark, roughly, almost two years. From 1950 to the late 60s. Okay. You come back to Newark 67, and that's where you retired?

Queen: Yeah.

Q: You left the Afro-American New Jersey. Around 67 until when?

Queen: 83, 84.

Q: Okay, that's when you retired. Okay.

Queen: Gotta to be something wrong.

Q: What's that?

Queen: There's got to be something not quite right in there. I don't know. But I think it's pretty clear.

Q: And so, let's sort of pick up with..

END OF INTERVIEW